

# INTEGRITY



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Subject: **Death**

Death is morbid only in the absence of Christ. But without the Hope of Him Who rose again from the dead, and promised that we would also, the world can only offer such feeble assurance as that of Rabbi Liebman in *Peace of Mind*, to the effect that death isn't so bad because most people are unconscious at the time.

By contrast we can say to our bewildered and disheartened brethren: "We will show you that death is the entrance to a much better life. We will teach you how to live so as to die well. We will give you a reason for clinging to your unloved husband, for bearing with your querulous, aged mother, for refusing to bend to dishonesty in your business, for holding to truth to the loss of a college degree, for enduring poverty and unpopularity and heartbreak and war and famine and cancer, and even martyrdom."

The reason is Christ, Who said, "He who believes in Me, although he be dead, shall live; and everyone that liveth and believeth in Me shall not die forever."

THE EDITORS



### DEPART O CHRISTIAN SOUL

*Out of this sinful world, in the name of God, the Father Almighty, who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered and died for thee; in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee; in the name of the glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God; in the name of blessed Joseph, the illustrious Spouse of the same Virgin; in the name of the Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Cherubim and Seraphim; in the name of the Patriarchs and Prophets, of the holy Apostles and Evangelists, of the holy Martyrs and Confessors, of the holy Monks and Hermits, of the holy Virgins and of all the Saints of God; let peace come to thee this day, and let thy abode be in holy Sion:*

*Through the same Christ our Lord.*



# Death of a Trappist

Anyone who wants to know something about the death of a Trappist must first have a reasonably clear idea of how a Trappist lives. Unfortunately, too many have (at the back of their minds) a completely impossible conception of the Trappist monk dwelling in the semi-darkness.

The monk who abides in these uneasy shadows is a lanky ghost of a man, half starved and not a little frantic with too much concentration on the skull he always has before him. His hands are calloused, but not with useful labor, only with digging his own grave. He digs a little bit out of that grave each day, heaving profound sighs and crooning over and over to himself "*Memento mori! Memento mori!* Remember that thou shalt die." As he is by now getting on in years his grave is well over a hundred and fifty feet deep and he wears himself out climbing in and out of the thing on moss-covered ladders. When he finally emerges at the top he fumbles around for his discipline and begins beating himself on the shoulders with it, doubtless in an honest effort to speed the coming of the day when he can stay in the earth for good and all.

It is extremely fortunate that such people never existed. But the mere fact that the legend of their existence is so tenacious is something that makes Trappists insist on being called by their true name. The word "Trappist" is an outmoded nickname for the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance. It comes from La Trappe, an important monastery of the Order in Normandy, where the famous Abbe De Rance instituted a reform of the Cistercian Order in the seventeenth century. The Cistercian life is nothing but the Rule of St. Benedict in the strict interpretation that was given to it by the founders of the Abbey of Citeaux, in France, in the twelfth century. Penance plays a great part in the life, but only as a means to an end. The Cistercian is a contemplative monk, and the fullness of the contemplative vocation is an intimate knowledge of God experienced, as it were, in the darkness of faith and in the contact that is established by a pure and supernatural love. The chief aim of the monk is to empty himself of all the trivial and accidental concerns of worldly existence in order to live for the one thing necessary, *frui Deo*, the perfect love that draws us into such close likeness to God that we are said to be transformed into Him, lost in His infinite perfections as a drop of water is lost in a gallon of wine.

Obviously a lugubrious and monomaniacal insistence on the physical aspects of death to the exclusion of everything else would be fatal to such a vocation, because it would be almost entirely irrelevant.

If Trappists have been accused in the past of creating an almost entirely mortuary ideal of the spiritual life, it is the fault of the romantic and pre-romantic movements in French literature. Poets like Chateaubriand got hold of De Rance and his Trappists and turned the whole thing into a macabre grand-opera according to the taste of his day. But Chateaubriand is one of the most completely unreliable writers that ever existed. He wrote a novel called "Rene," part of which is laid in the United States. He shows us, for instance, his hero meditating on the brink of Niagara Falls and listening to the "roaring of the crocodiles" on the rocks below. So don't believe anything Chateaubriand tells you about Trappists.

Last year, Father Anselme Dimier, a Cistercian monk of the Abbey of Tamie in the Alps, brought out an interesting little book called *La Sombre Trappe* to trace all these absurdities to their sources.

Once all this has been said, to clear the air, we may consider how a Cistercian monk looks at death, how his life prepares him to meet death.

There is no need for a man to make his drinking cup out of a skull in order to remind himself of the elementary fact that he will not live forever. But, nevertheless, we all need to be reminded of it. It is one thing to admit, intellectually, the obvious truth that the world can never offer us satisfactions that cannot be taken away; but it is quite another thing to live in practice as if temporal things were not ends in themselves and worldly pleasures were not destined to last forever. Scripture reminds us, "In all thy works remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin." (Eccli. vii, 40.) The implication is that this is one of the things we most easily forget—otherwise there would not be so much sin.

People who have the misfortune to live outside of monasteries, in a world that seeks only to enrich itself by the exploitation of every appetite that can be forced beyond the limits of order, really need some systematic method of reminding themselves of death. One might think that the spectacle of a society that is in its last agony ought to be a forceful enough reminder. The smell of decay that comes out of every movie-theatre and night club ought to be enough to keep us thinking of the grave. But it takes grace to detect these things and too many people have lost their spiritual sense of smell. . . .

Inside monasteries, above all contemplative monasteries, it is a different matter. Once he is out of the novitiate the Cistercian monk seldom needs to make a systematic meditation on death, although discursive reflection on the "last things" is such a fundamental weapon in the spiritual life that everyone will keep it in reserve against an emergency. But a contemplative who forced himself, with too much



of a stubborn insistence, to keep picturing decaying bodies and so forth, would certainly ruin his spiritual life. The aim of all discursive meditations is to convince us of our need of God and of God's power to help us. When these convictions bear fruit, as they soon do, in a permanent affective "thirst" for the presence and contact of God, meditation is absorbed into a fundamentally simple and uniform interior "attitude" which accompanies the monk everywhere. His soul becomes like a sunflower that follows the Divine source of all light and warmth wherever it goes. *Oculi mei semper ad Dominum*. Its eyes find rest only in constant, silent looking towards God. That is the essence of its prayer.

More than by any system of meditations, this "attitude," this permanent spirit of prayer, in which prayer becomes as natural and as easy and as simple as breathing, is nourished by the liturgy and by spiritual reading.

A Cistercian could really afford to dispense with formal meditations on death altogether if he follows the liturgy. The Cistercians recite the Office of the Dead on an average six times a month, and there are four "solemn anniversaries" during the year, when the Office of the Dead and a Pontifical Requiem are sung. The monks know the principal parts of that office by heart, and could sing whole passages of the chant without need of a book. Consequently, it may often happen when one is out at work in the woods and fields that some snatch of chant from one of the responsories of the Office of the Dead may start going in the monk's mind. There is a peculiar pathos in the sober and austere Gregorian melodies of that office, and it brings out all the humility and helplessness that pleads to God in the tremendous words: *Libera me Domine de morte aeterna*. . . .

What is much more fruitful for the soul is a Cistercian funeral. Hardly a year goes by in which someone in the community does not at least receive the Last Sacraments. In fact Cistercians are much more often anointed than buried. The grace of the Sacrament may keep an old Brother going for another year or two. But in any case, the whole community assists at the ceremony, praying and chanting psalms. You learn more about death by coming face to face with it, through liturgical prayer, than you would get out of books and meditations if you plugged at them for a hundred years.

When a Cistercian actually does die, he is taken down to the monastic church in procession, in an open bier, dressed in his religious habit. He is placed in the middle of the choir with a candle and crucifix at his head and a stoup of holy water at his feet, and until he is buried, two monks will always be sitting by the body, day and night, reciting psalms alternately in a low voice. They take turns to perform

this office of charity. At night they take long two-hour shifts, so that the constant going and coming may not wake up the others in the common dormitory.

Sometimes these night wakes fall to the lot of a couple of novices and there is no question that it makes a deep impression. The huge empty church becomes very dark and very silent, and the body in the open bier does not seem to lie as still as it ought to, in the flickering candlelight; but you are also very much aware of another presence—where the sanctuary lamp also flickers before the tabernacle—and taking your courage in both hands you start murmuring the Latin words of the psalms. It is strange how quickly the time goes, and when you suddenly realize that your watch is over and that you must return to your straw mattress and bed of planks, you are somehow unwilling to leave. While you were praying there, a deep and sane and vivifying sense of fellowship was growing up that linked you in some mysterious way with the soul to which that body once belonged and to which it will one day be returned. And as you walk through the dark echoing cloister you are no longer afraid of death or of dead bodies but you see them as they are—sad, inevitable things whose sorrow is not without an infinitely merciful remedy.

Praying for the dead in this real and down-to-earth fashion brings you an almost experimental appreciation of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints. One really feels bound in a mysterious and powerful solidarity with these souls, a solidarity that will last forever and which is rich and fruitful in its exchange of graces. The souls of the monks who have died before us come constantly back to our minds and we offer the thought to God in the chalice of some Mass that is being celebrated somewhere in the world at that moment; and in return we feel that many favors have come to us from those who have been grateful for our prayers.

Perhaps the most dramatic thing of all is the way the monk is buried. He is lowered into the ground without a coffin, without a bier. The monastery infirmarian goes down into the grave and covers the face of the corpse and as soon as he climbs out again the earth begins to fall and the dead Cistercian disappears. And yet to many this simplicity and poverty have something about them that is immensely clean in comparison with the nightmare of fake luxury and flowers with which the world tries to disguise the fact of death. It is not the burial of a monk, wrapped in no other shroud than the clothes he always wore that is frightening; no, it is those embalmed corpses rouged up to look like wax-works and couched in satin cushions that terrify the heart and make even the healthy smell of flowers horrible by the association they contract with undertakers and funerals.



But the most important thing is not how the body of a Cistercian is buried; that is trivial. The real question is: how does such a soul enter into the presence of God?

The death of a true contemplative is inevitably the crown of a life of contemplation. It is the final liberation of a soul from all that impeded it, prevented it from seeing God, held it back from the perfect possession of God and restrained its swift flight to the center towards which it has tended with the almost irresistible gravitation of pure love. At last the body breaks like a web and the soul leaps out, exulting like a flame into the blinding glory of God.

There is no purgatory for the perfect contemplative, because there is nothing left; his liberation is complete. He has had his purgatory on earth, in years of searing, searching interior trials, years of charity and humility and poverty and obscure labor that have stripped him of layer after layer of selfishness and imperfection, and reduced him to nothing in his own eyes. He has been delivered from his own selfishness and his own callousness and hardness of heart by years of sacrifice. The penetrating fire of infused love has made all selfishness intolerable for him, and it has purged him slowly and inexorably of every desire for created pleasure, every ambition, every hope of fame or power; for years all these things have been intolerable to him. The things that cause other men pleasure have caused him nothing but pain, because of the agonizing sense of their insufficiency they brought with them. The things that seem to slake other men's thirst only increase his to a burning torture, and he has long since learned to refuse them all, as Christ refused the vinegar on the Cross. He has long since acquired that wisdom which is best recognized, according to St. Bernard, by the ability to rejoice in suffering because then we truly know we are rejoicing for no selfish motive, but only in the will of God. He has now arrived at that perfection of love which seeks nothing for itself and yet even loves itself perfectly in God, seeing itself as God sees it, loving itself because it holds within itself the perfect reflection of God, cleaned of every stain of selfishness that makes one different from God.

When the last shred of that self-love which constituted a barrier, a difference between the soul and God, has fallen away, the likeness of the soul to its Creator and Exemplar is now perfectly restored; nothing remains but the confirmation and sealing of this union in the glory of an everlasting vision, an everlastingly perfect mutual giving of the soul to God and of God to the soul.

There has never been written anywhere a better description of such a death than that which St. John of the Cross gives us in his *Living Flame of Love*.

The death of such souls is very sweet and gentle, more so than was their spiritual life all their life long, for they die amid the delectable encounters and sublimest impulses of love. . . . For this reason David said that the death of saints in the fear of God was precious for at such a time all the riches of the soul come to unite together *and the rivers of love of the soul are about to enter the sea, and these are so broad that they seem to be seas already.* (Peers trans. iii, 135)

That is the way the saints, the contemplatives die. Does that mean that such perfection and such a going forth to God is reserved only for those who have lived all their lives in a cloister? Far from it. It may well happen that a Cistercian monk, by failing to make the proper use of the means God has put at his disposal, may be far less perfect than some poor housewife, some laborer in the world. But the secret of that sanctity is the same: the perfection of charity which is most easily and quickly reached by union with God in contemplation. Is this an extraordinary grace that is reserved only for special souls? No! Perfection and the means to perfection are accessible to all, and those who want to travel the road that ends with such an entrance into the glory of heaven have only to set foot on the road by praying to Him Who said ask and you shall receive. They have only to begin leading an interior life and the rest of the way will be made plain.

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### A POOR FINISH

John Algernon Abbott, had made it a habit,  
To plan every thing in advance.  
He properly bathed, and carefully shaved,  
When asked to a tea or a dance.

How sad to relate, that prudence so great,  
Should fail when 'twas needed the most.  
He died one fine morning, without any warning  
And gave up an unprepared ghost.



# The Death of Western Society

It is only when you see our Western society as dying that you can make any sense out of it. If the contemporary scene is viewed as a deathbed scene, things fall into their right perspective, all the way down to the death rattle contributed by the ignorant but voluble optimists.

This is not an original idea, of course. The obsequies of the West have been celebrated by many a modern thinker. The trouble with most of the learned diagnosticians is the same as the trouble which affects many a medical doctor these days—they do not realize that they are in on the death of what has been redeemed by Christ. They are always comparing ours with the dead civilizations of the ancient world, which inevitably corrupted and died, inevitably and mysteriously. Much of the mystery and all of the inevitableness of our plight vanishes if you see that we are attending the last hours, not just of a splendid civilization, but of *Christendom*. The proper comparison is not with Rome or Egypt or even Babylon (despite many a similarity); it is with the Christian man. Societies are not men, and they don't have immortal souls; they will not go to heaven or hell. Nevertheless a striking analogy can be seen between the death of a Christian and the death of Christendom.

## The All-Important Moment

The most important thing about death is that it is the final decisive moment of a man's life. Our life-paths are marked by temptations to mortal sin (the only real crises), at each of which a man turns decisively toward God or away from God. At death he has the final choice and so, no matter how the world may choose to gloss over the end of a man, that moment is not ignored by those who know its true significance. God and the Devil contend then for a man's soul. The Devil puts up quite a fight, unless he has long had the case sewed up. But God provides special graces that are even more powerful. In the natural order God has provided the "fear of death" which comes over a man in his last illness, presaging the end. It brings even the most superficial and worldly people (indeed especially these people) sharply to the consideration of eternal things and moral judgment. It is a last-ditch opportunity to turn to God's mercy through fear, if one has failed heretofore to seek Him through love. For many it is the last opportunity to save their souls.

Quite different and far greater is the supernatural help Christ has provided in the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, which along with Confession and Viaticum prepare a person for a holy departure from this

life, and give graces to resist the Devil's temptations. The last anointing also restores health if it is for the good of the soul.

There is one other Christian aid to dying and that is, as traditionally taught by the Church, that Our Lady intercedes especially at that time—"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and *at the hour of our death.*"

## The Devil and Modern Death

In view of all the assistance God gives the dying man, the Devil is relatively powerless because all he can do is present temptations to the imagination. Yet working subtly (when will we learn that the Devil is much cleverer than we are?) and indirectly, Satan has arranged to win the deathbed battle without even bothering to be present. This is how it is done. First of all he has arranged for a conspiracy of silence about the impending death, under the guise of virtue. Productive as we all are today of a sentimental, residual humanitarianism, it is almost universally considered dastardly to allow a person to prepare to meet God. You must not tell him he's dying because it might kill him, is the curious line of reasoning that is taken. Yet for millions of materialists sodden with self-indulgence, what could be more salutary in the light of eternity than to spend several weeks contemplating the certainty of dying (provided, of course, that the love of God and the prospect of heaven are also made known). It would be enough to sanctify very mediocre material. As long, however, as hospitals and doctors and families continue dogmatically to hold their secular views, the Devil can take a vacation.

There is also the little matter of sudden death. The chances of a man's dying in an automobile accident or an airplane crash or by bombing, atomic or otherwise, are very good today—vastly greater than ever before. If we were all holy people it wouldn't matter if we were caught unawares, but the likelihood is that some of us could use a few minutes for an act of contrition and so, at present, sudden death plays into the Devil's hands. Indeed, he may have helped invent some of the instruments thereof.

Finally, we find modern man lavishly provided with opiates to ease the pain of dying. This is no simple situation. There appears to be a great increase in suffering (notably cancer) combined with a loss of the ability, physical and spiritual, to accept it. It would indeed be cruel to take away a cancer patient's morphine.

Yet morphine, besides killing pain, gives people a false sense of well-being. A man who is, in fact, about to die feels that his demise is remote. That "fear of death" which God provided in our very nature, as a last salutary warning, just doesn't operate. Does it make very much difference? I have heard of a nurse whose cancer patient was ill



great physical anguish and even greater moral peril, highly unrepentant and openly contemptuous of God. There was no way of reaching the woman through the pleasant haze of morphine, so the nurse stopped giving morphine, merely going through the motions as larger and larger doses were ordered by the doctor in response to the woman's complaints. As soon as the morphine wore off, the fear of death penetrated even the pain. The patient repented, made her peace with God, and then was given morphine again to ease the last few hours. What this nurse did (her moral duty) would be considered a shockingly cruel and professionally unethical thing. To allow pain for the salvation of a soul is considered immoral—by people who are beginning to commit murder as the latest in pain-killers.

### **The Misspent Latter Days of Western Society**

Let us now get to our analogy. Like men, societies die; also like men they sin mortally (that is, men collectively turn against God). Our society has committed more and more serious sins. There was a terrible break with God when Christendom split and half of it fell into heresy. But a sort of recovery was made. There was another bad break following the Industrial Revolution when men turned their hearts to the accumulation of wealth. But we marched on down the wrong road, still far from its dead end, still able to turn back. Then we turned God out of the peace conferences and we turned fervently nationalistic. Again and again we drove out the religious, confiscating their monasteries. The going got tougher, what with a succession of wars. And we got desperate in our sinning, using incendiary and finally atomic bombs. All along the way until now there has been the possibility of repentance and recovery. But now it is different. Christendom is dying.

The patient has cancer. It is riddled with it. It is diseased in almost every cell. This being so, the disease may be studied locally. An X-ray of the local cancers of Kansas City or Miami would be almost as revealing as one done in Budapest or Chicago or Moscow. The remedy can also be applied locally—but we'll come to that. Our society is dying and is in a state of mortal sin.

### **Our Lady**

That's why Our Lady keeps appearing. It is the hour of our death, so she comes to tell us that she is interceding for us, and pouring graces upon us. She says what you say to a dying man: Repent, do penance, pray, turn again to God. You don't approach a dying banker with a new loan system or a dying mayor with plans for a housing project. You don't suggest to a dying not-so-good housewife that she try a new vacuum cleaner, or approach the dying drunk for membership

in AA. It is too late for new beginnings in the temporal order. Nothing remains except to repent and make your peace with God. The Blessed Virgin is the only one giving sensible advice these days.

### **The Fear of Death**

God is trying to give us the fear of death too, by showing us as clearly as possible that we are dying and that we have sinned. Everything men touch fails these days. Men can't make peace. Men can't stop divorce. Men can't cure or prevent insanity. Men can't distribute the world's goods properly. The financial world is a mess; the economic world is a mess; the political world is a mess. And the atom bomb hovers over us. But why go on? Our heart is failing; our lungs are almost finished. Everywhere there are aches and sores.

God's mercy in our day wears a disguise to the ordinary man. Just as the fear of death is merciful in the case of the dying man (because it is a help to salvation), even if it isn't pleasant, so God is gracious now in allowing our plans to fail. Were we only sick, or even healthy, He would show His love in good harvests and soft rain. But in the hour of death, supreme mercy is to defeat man's hope whenever he seeks it where there is no hope; so that in the end he may turn to his Only Hope.

### **Us and the Devil**

What's happened to the Devil? He's taking a vacation somewhere, because he has everyone working for him.

First he has all the doctors and relatives around to assure us we'll be up and about in a week or two. All those newspaper men, teachers, public officials and professional statesmen who make a life work of reassuring us, belong in this group.

Then the Devil is tempting us to sins of the flesh and unbelief on a colossal scale. His major helpers here are the advertising men who thrust upon us a multiplicity of luxuries to tempt us to sins of the flesh. As long as we are drowned in the comforts and gadgets of materialism we will be too stupid to see how late it is. But should we try to rise to the intellectual level we shall only encounter the stupidities and inanities of a decadent and diseased liberalism, calculated to drive us all into the oblivion of dementia.

But the Devil's big work is in opiates. We are doped with spiritual morphine until we have developed a shocking unconcern, a false sense of security. It is done with movies, radio, mass circulation magazines, comic strips. A man need never think, be silent, come face to face with the God Who will so soon judge him.

### **Hypodermic Needles**

When a man is dying a nurse will often startle him back into a few minutes of life with a hypodermic needle. In a way fascism and



communism are like hypodermic needles. In a dying, lethargic people they stimulate momentarily a little life through force and emotional fervor. It looks strong, but it can't last because it is an artificial stimulation. Yet we who hate these tyrannic movements had better see them for what they are—an unlovely alternative to death. What have we to offer in their place?

### **The Last Sacraments**

It is too late for any purely economic or political nostrum, even a good one. It is interesting to speculate as to whether Belloc's and Chesterton's Distributism (which was essentially an economic scheme) might have saved England and possibly Europe, if it had been applied in, say the 1920's. One wonders if some correction of the ills of usury wouldn't have mended many matters once. Quite possibly so. While we were still suffering from acute mortal sin there was the possibility of turning back, and whereas it would have to be accompanied by a turning back to God also, it could possibly have started with economic reform. Chesterton's insistence that we go back to where we took the wrong road, and his insistence also that it had to be done very quickly, were probably quite correct at that time. It was the eleventh hour. We didn't turn back. Now it is midnight and we are dying!

There is only one hope for society now, and that is hope in the supernatural. The doctors have failed. Let the priests take over, including the lay priesthood of Catholic Action.

First of all there must be penance, as is beginning to happen as men are turned by grace from sinning and worldliness to beg for forgiveness. This includes the converts, and the cradle Catholics who are being converted from mediocrity to some comprehension of the meaning of their Faith.

After the turning away from evil to God comes the strengthening of the Eucharist, which more and more people are receiving daily.

And finally, then, these people who have turned away from a corrupt world to purify themselves by the Sacraments, administer to our dying society a sort of Extreme Unction in the form of Catholic action. Whether it uses the Jocist technique or some other integrating form, this Catholic action must have the effect of dynamically restoring supernatural grace to our dying world. Therefore all purely natural efforts will fall infinitely short of the vitality necessary. When a billing machine operator invites the engaged girl at the next desk to an explanation of the Sacrament of Matrimony, she is applying a bit of the holy unction, as is the contemplative nun doing penance for the world, and the Belgian Jocist restoring purity to a factory, and the Mexican Catholic Action girl teaching catechism in a remote, priest-less province,

and the Hungarian martyr before the forces of communism, and the mother who starts the family rosary.

But the man, whoever he may be, who goes all out for the Republican Party, or rests his hope in a planned society or in our banks, or International Business Machines, or free milk at ten o'clock in the morning, or the Marshall Plan, or what not, is impotent to help dying Christendom and probably will hasten its corruption. And Grover Whalen, with his plan for New York City's Golden Jubilee, is only fiddling while Rome burns.

All men ought to love God with their whole hearts but at this crucial point no one ought to make his religion a subsidiary or part-time occupation. The only people who can save society are those who give their whole lives to doing so. In the midst of secular occupations the prime concern will be to speak of God to those with whom they are associated and to try to turn the institutions of society once more Christ-ward.

### **If It Is for the Good of the Soul**

If our analogy holds, that something like Extreme Unction is being applied to our dying society by Catholic action and other vital movements, then the patient should recover its health, *if it is for the good of its soul*. That must mean that if the effect is strong enough and successful enough and soon enough to turn men and institutions decisively Godward, we shall be spared. There would be no point in saving Western society if it only meant a continued increase in the population of hell—just as there is no point in having children if they are to lose their souls.

How much has to be done to make it worthwhile to save us? No one knows, but it isn't just a matter of numbers—one person in a state of grace plus another person in a state of grace, etc. There is also the matter of re-directing society, which means reintegrating life with religious principles. If then, health is restored, it will come about naturally, as in Extreme Unction, and naturally in this case means through a new synthesis.

Let us therefore make haste, using all our energy to restore things in Christ. Let those who think we are not in a final crisis consider if they are not enjoying a false peace, opium induced. And let us not be like the social workers and nurses (whom may heaven help) who hide the fact of impending death because the patient is "psychologically unprepared" to face it. God does not wait on our good pleasure, let alone our folly.

PETER MICHAELS



# The Case of the Painted Corpse

When history has recorded the story of these times, and seen it all in the context of past and future, one of the noteworthy peculiarities of the age will be the fact that seeking money as an end in itself was regarded socially as something perfectly respectable. The Christian era had its profiteers, but they were recognized for what they were—outlaws. In the era which follows this one, whether it be Christian (as we hope it will), or communist totalitarian (which seems to be the alternative), social activity toward the end of self-aggrandizement, will once again be regarded as unlawful. One of the few remaining traces of the contempt bestowed upon self-seeking in an earlier and more enlightened age, is the current designation of such practices as "rackets."

Although the universal conscience of our society accepts profit-seeking as respectable, the individual conscience still, to some extent, rejects it. That is why a man may refer to his business while among friends as a "racket," and yet be angry if the same term is assigned to his occupation by a stranger. Taking unfair advantage of one's fellowmen is sometimes applauded as good salesmanship and sometimes condemned as poor sportsmanship. This is the dual morality of the times.

The most remarkable example of commercialization today is the manner in which we dispose of our dead. In this we have the strange juxtaposition of hard-headed business with bewildered grief. No one in society seems to have an answer for the enigma of death except the undertaker, and his answer is a tally sheet edged in black. The cause and the blame for this accepted practice is what we intend to explore in this article. Why has burying the dead (a corporal work of mercy) become a "racket" (an occupation directed to profit)?

## The Grand Finale

We choose as a case in point a typical urban Catholic post-mortem ceremony. In this ritual we see the magnificent and beautiful send-off extended to a child of God by his mother the Church interspersed with the secular ritual of modern burial practices. Like two slender candles of virginal beeswax, the two acts of the Church burn at the head and foot of the deserted temple of the Holy Ghost: Extreme Unction, the oils of salvation, and the Requiem Mass, the offering of Christ's Body and Blood for a soul seeking peace. Banked around these candles, almost hiding them from view, are the garlands and festoons of an age that has failed to see beyond the door of death into the eternal garden of union with God.

In this dramatic finale to the drama of life, there are three leading characters, the undertaker, the bereaved, and the deceased. As death raises the curtain, we see them together. The undertaker is in control. Upon his face we see, mixed in proper proportion, solemn sympathy and resolute purpose. As the first act of the ritual, he extends his condolences; the second act is a tactful but careful perusal of insurance policies. The information he gleans there is his clue. The estate from which his bill must be paid, is the first determining factor in the choice of props. Later, after he has groomed the corpse for its role, his salesmanship will be the second determining factor. The casket will be chosen under his guidance. When that matter is settled, he can proceed, attentive to his trade, unburdened with financial matters.

When we see the corpse and bereaved again, a strange change will have taken place. Both will have undergone a charm school treatment. New clothes will have been purchased and donned. The hair of the living and of the dead will be waved and set. The cosmetician will have tried to produce in one case a spirit of dignified mourning, and in the other a spirit of healthful slumber. The corpse, in posture and mien, will portray a man (or woman) sartorially draped for a convention or ball, who has momentarily decided to take a dignified nap in a sort of elaborately quilted and satinized, over-sized and overdressed bassinette.

Usually the living room of the deceased, unless it were completely overhauled, would serve as poor background for so elaborate a deceit. For this esthetic, as well as for more practical reasons, the glamorized corpse, the bereaved, relatives, and friends, have all been transported to new quarters. This is called a funeral parlor (home, or chapel). The architecture varies according to the artistic imagination of the funeral director. A Catholic clientele seems to prefer "period" furnishings rather than the nude plastic modernity of their more progressive non-Catholic neighbors. The general impression is that of a man who has done pretty well for himself and "passed away" under enviable circumstances.

The customary practice during the hours when the funeral parlor is open to the public is to exchange muttered sympathies with the near relatives, the more common of which are, "He (or she) is better off", "I'm very sorry," "He (or she) lived a full life," "Doesn't he (or she) look natural?" This embarrassing obligation fulfilled, attention is immediately drawn (to everyone's satisfaction) to the temporal and transient affairs of the living. A determined relative may violate the atmosphere by inciting the gathering to prayer. Some resolute parochial organizations have grimly set to work to restore this archaic



practice. When it does occur, the embarrassed piety clashes discordantly with the smoothly rendered "Panis Angelicus" disk-jockeyed from some hidden corner by the busy funeral director.

After the "memory picture" has been painted in unforgettable strokes, Mother Church is permitted to intercede on behalf of her departed child. How good God is to have designed the Church as a perpetual guardian of reality! The prayers of the Mass for the Dead cut cleanly through the curtain of unreality spun by the ingenious funeral director. When the Mass is over, hired flunkies carry the casket away. The weight of the modern casket relieves the friends of the burden and the grace which proceeds from carrying the body of a saint to his last resting place.

At the grave the web of unreality is spun again. An artificial carpet of grass hides the newly dug earth. The casket is hidden behind mountains of flowers. As a reluctant concession to Christian symbolism, a clod of dirt is delicately dropped on the casket with a silver-plated trowel. The great fact of death that might, were it embraced as an inevitable and merciful act of Providence, lead to a conversion of the mourners to a more penetrating understanding of eternal verities, is instead treated like an unclean creature to be hidden behind the tails of a morning suit.

### **The High Cost of Dying**

Every year in the United States some 1,500,000 dead bodies must be disposed of somehow. Every family in the United States, on an average, has a funeral every twelve years. Every year the nation spends from \$350,000,000 to \$500,000,000 on funeral expenses.

Every year some 1,500,000 families are subjected to super-salesmanship in their hours of grief, when their defenses are down, when their "sales resistance" is most low, and when they are least able to think objectively and reason logically. Then it is that sales-minded funeral directors point out expensive, metal-lined caskets, bedecked with satin and all the other fancy fixings that add nothing but to the price of the funeral. That is why, though coffins or caskets may be obtained for as little as \$30, that fact will be news to most people.

Nowadays most funerals fall into the \$300 to \$399 bracket, and the \$400 to \$499 bracket is the next most frequent. At the Centralia mine disaster, to quote a specific case, the funeral costs ranged from \$233 to \$1,178.50, with the average \$732.78. The United Mine Workers protested bitterly at these high costs, but the funeral trade journals felt the charges were well justified in view of the high wages earned by miners. They apparently feel justified in charging all the traffic will bear.

It is only in our generation that burying the dead has become such a costly and sometimes lucrative occupation. As a result, the number of funeral directors has increased tremendously. The problem facing the funeral industry was one that other industries have faced. Their volume of business (i.e., number of funerals) was more or less fixed; their only solution was to sell more goods. And of course, more and higher priced goods would be an even better solution. This seems to have been a uniform decision of manufacturers, distributors, and everyone in the business. And judging from the advertisements in the funeral trade magazines, the trend is still upward. Apparently the point of diminishing returns has not yet been reached.

Undertaking generally shares the viewpoint of all big business—that service is for profit. This is rarely stated as bluntly as it was by one funeral director recently. His firm had changed its method of charging for funerals. It had been based on a high charge for the casket, which represented the total cost of the funeral. They were worried because the public had become more critical of casket costs and values, comparing them with other merchandise and commodities. They were afraid the casket companies would not continue "providing high and unequitable mark-ups to help the funeral director cover up service charges in the retail prices of caskets." Therefore, he wrote, we changed our way of pricing. The first reason he cited was: "For the very good reason for which we are all engaged in the business and profession, to make more money."

At the 1947 convention of Pennsylvania funeral directors, a certified public accountant cited some cost figures for a small establishment with about 70 funerals a year. His figures were purely imaginary, he said; but out of his experience they certainly had basis in fact. The average sale, he estimated, would be \$335. This would be allocated as follows: Merchandise and supplies, \$109; wages \$77 (including the owner's salary or replacement cost); and overhead expenses \$105. This totaled \$292, leaving a profit of \$42 per "case." On the basis of 70 funerals or "cases" per year, this gave a profit of \$2,940 for this small establishment, plus the owner's salary, already included.

It is interesting to study figures quoted by the undertaking business. The cost figures include everything that one can imagine—especially the owner's salary. There is cost of "merchandise and supplies," allowance for bad debts, depreciation on buildings, equipment and motor vehicles; insurance, interest on debts, other salaries, etc. There is usually a small profit left, with a footnote reminding one that all "cases" do not afford a profit. The figures carefully ignore the fact that the owner has already taken out his own salary, usually a comfortable living, and the "profit" shown is over, above and in addition to this comfortable living.



## The Casket Carry-All

Up till fairly recently, the casket carried the entire cost of the funeral. Its cost to the undertaker usually represented about 20% of the retail price quoted the bereaved; the remainder of 80% was supposed to carry all other costs of the funeral—representing embalming, use of funeral home and all other services.

There is now a trend away from this, to one of selling the "complete funeral" at whatever the family may feel able or willing to pay. This package buying seems to be the sales plan for the future.

All the technique of modern super-salesmanship is put into the sale of the casket. The other "services" generally fall in line with it. It is not today as it was with the ancient Egyptians, when there were three principal types of "cases," depending upon the type of preservatives, spices, and ointments used. Today embalming is but a minor cost, roughly \$30 to \$35 of the total, or approximately 10%.

The casket companies advertise on a national scale, plugging their product both with the retailer (the undertaker) and the ultimate consumer. They furnish the funeral director with selling points so he may say the right thing at the right time, and make the best possible sale. To the national audience they offer booklets, so they may do the right thing when the time comes, always featuring fear, always stressing water proof, element proof, moisture proof. Delicate and not so delicate hints are made in the casket salesroom about how unfortunate it would be if Aunt Adelaide were allowed to be exposed to er—ah—worms. So ignorant are many moderns of the facts of death that they do not know that after the soul has left the body, the body naturally corrupts, whether a little sooner or a little later being a matter of indifference to its former tenant.

### **"The Sizzle Sells the Steak"**

More and more people are disgusted with the super-sales technique to which they succumbed at one time or another, in the fog of grief and shock. "But you want the best for your dear mother, of course," the routine goes, "and I think I have just the thing here in our special padded-silk bronze casket, with a special price on the Class A weather-defying concrete vault." There is often the veiled implication that unless one is willing to put out all the money possible on such accoutrements, the grief isn't genuine, the tears aren't truthful, and love is centered more on the insurance money than the late departed.

This sales technique is carefully fostered by the trade journals of the industry, and by the so-called leaders in it. For instance, one of the feature speakers at the 1946 convention of the National Funeral Directors Association was Elmer ("the sizzle sells the steak") Wheeler,

a well known peddler of ideas on high-pressure salesmanship. No one attempted to hide the fact that a highly competitive business put a premium on salesmanship.

Some years ago, one of the business trade journals featured an article exemplifying this idea. It was amusingly written, but basically the problem was one of selling higher priced coffins so as to make more money. The answer was a simple one: display only higher priced coffins. Stock the cheaper ones, because occasionally you may be called upon to furnish a cheap funeral by clients who can afford no better; but make it very difficult for them to have a low-priced funeral; make it embarrassing for them to ask for a less expensive casket. And the tip-off of the callous, unprincipled attitude of the writer of the article (who thoughtfully did not provide his name) was in reply to a bit of dialogue:

After being urged not to display cheaper caskets, the funeral director said, "but if I don't give my clients what they want they will go elsewhere."

"What," said our hero, "after you have the body?"

Another instance is that of the head of one of our American embalming schools. He was in England some years ago, and was shocked almost beyond words by the deplorable state of English undertaking enterprise. He decried the old-type coffins they still carried, and what he considered their unbusinesslike way of doing business. He made it clear that their aim should be to increase funeral expenditure. It was, he declared, a "merchandising" proposition, and he wished people to "buy a better grade coffin."

## **Cosmetology and Restorative Art**

With the emphasis on "display," cosmetology and restorative art are among the most important courses in the modern embalming school, and many other courses are co-related to them. Embalming of itself, for instance, is relatively simple; but when considered in relation to display it becomes more complicated and exacting.

Cosmetology is the important factor. As one embalming fluid manufacturer advertises, "your prestige and your income are determined by the appearances of your cases," and of course that's why you should use their embalming fluid—"to gain greater prestige and increased income."

The purposes of cosmetics in embalming have been listed as follows by one authority:

1. Psychological effect upon the bereaved.
2. To afford a well groomed appearance to the subject.
3. Retain or develop personality of the deceased.
4. Conceal discoloration.



5. Emphasize or diminish certain facial features or prominences.
6. Counteract adverse effects of daylight or artificial illumination.
7. Correction of restorative deficiencies of embalming fluid.
8. As a corrective measure for results of incompetent or indifferent operative technique.

All this gives plausibility to the following, which one author has quoted as an advertisement by a London undertaker:

For composing features—\$1.

For giving the features a look of quiet resignation—\$2.

For giving the features the appearance of Christian hope and contentment—\$5.

### **Fashionable, Even Though Dead**

Together with caskets, there has grown up a whole series of transactions in which the undertaker purportedly is rendering a service, but often service with a profit. This is recognized candidly by the trade journals of the business. Speaking of burial garments, one authority advises funeral directors that the original impression of the body reposing in the slumber room before the casket is selected has much to do with that selection. The better the original impression, he continues, the more a family is willing to spend for a casket, a vault, and for a burial garment. The "memory picture" created by the funeral director becomes a strong influence in the choice of funeral merchandise. The article concludes with this touching thought:

"That there are vast profit possibilities in the proper merchandising of burial dresses is evident by our own success and that of many funeral directors throughout the country, whose experiences served to convince us that burial garments do help sell better caskets."

The National Casket Company, ever aware of the possibility of bigger and better funerals, prepared a booklet, *Funeral Facts*, for general distribution in 1930. It carried this pertinent advice for the general public when the time comes:

"The funeral director generally carries a carefully selected assortment of women's dresses and men's suits . . . They are patterned closely after the garments worn by the living . . . The funeral director is also prepared to match the outer garments with appropriate slips, stockings, shoes or slippers. Because of the increasing use of color in caskets and other funeral furnishings, this ability to carry out color harmony is most important. It gives an absolute assurance that the dictates of good taste and personal preference will be followed in every detail."

### **The Insurance Aspect**

Costly funerals, as we have them today, are a product of the last century. And during the last century there has been a tremendous

growth in the coverage of insurance, so that hardly a family today is without insurance of some sort. The connection between these two facts is not an obscure one, for the modern undertaking business would be impossible without the modern insurance business.

The connection is so complete that many Catholics today consider it a disgrace and a shameful act, almost a sinful act, to make no provision for their burial—financial provision, that is. Thus they lay by money, through insurance policies, so their families may squander it on \$500 funerals. The corporal work of mercy known as burying the dead has been effectively eliminated in practice and despised in theory.

When one considers the degree to which insurance institutions depend upon life insurance for their income, and then cast a glance at the institution of the "memorial industry" which it has sired, we can see how modern institutions fatten upon a kind of sentimental superstition that would shame a primitive savage. The hollow "security" which is the insurance companies' stock in trade is epitomized by a concrete-bedded, bronze-encased, satin-covered corpse which will soon corrupt as completely and as fully as though it were surrounded by nothing but God's good earth.

Without insurance, does anyone believe it would be possible to have such a tremendous increase in funeral costs as we have had in the past century? A funeral in Boston in 1829, for instance, cost a total of \$8, without the coffin. A funeral in New York City a hundred years later cost nearly a thousand dollars, not including \$750 for the coffin—excuse, please, the casket, for coffin now has a derogatory cheap meaning.

Within the memory of the present generation, undertaking has developed from an adjunct of local furniture dealers to pretentious funeral homes, in the style of Colonial or Southern mansions, replete with slumber salons, repose rooms, and private chapels so carefully undenominational, and about as religious as a movie theater.

Generally speaking, all this has been financed by small policy insurance—the policies having a face value of less than \$500, and on which premiums are paid each week. After all, anyone can afford 25c a week, is the reasoning, and you wouldn't want your parents to have to provide the money to bury you, would you? Thus, this type of insurance is generally considered burying money, and undertakers are happy to concur.

### **Who Is To Blame?**

The memorial industry and the industry of funeral directing do not exercise a tyranny over the people. The high cost of funerals is not imposed. As a matter of fact, cooperative funeral organizations



which cut the costs to a fraction, have not been popularly received. Funeral directors who have tried to discourage inordinate generosity to unappreciative corpses have often met with rebuffs. The case is one of corruption, not tyranny.

Burying the dead would not have shifted over from a corporal work of mercy to a business unless the Christian concept of death had become perverted. We do not know how to care for the dead because we have forgotten the lessons of Calvary and the Resurrection. We have become so enamoured of temporal life that we cannot graciously bid Godspeed to a soul bound for eternity. We have not lived in sufficient awe of that God-made image composed of body and soul, to approach with respect the occasion of its temporary disintegration. Most of the blame can be socially distributed. The institution is built by common consent.

### **The Virtuous Undertaker**

Many an undertaker has earned the reputation of being an exemplary member of his parish and community. Compared with men in other occupations, the function of the undertaker has been generally exercised in a praiseworthy fashion. The point we would like to make here is that that standard of measurement is not adequate. Undertaking is in no way comparable to a business, and it is only similar to a profession by proximity. The corporal work of mercy of burying the dead is essentially a religious act, and the undertaker is the celebrant. This is where his dignity resides. This is the measure of the goodness or badness of his work.

Some undertakers with obvious good will have tried to instigate minor reforms within their field. They have discouraged ostentation. They have displayed true sympathy toward the bereaved, advising economy, and not infrequently giving their services gratis when the family was poor. They have been of service in cutting the political red tape so confusing to a bereaved family. They have supported their parish church financially and energetically. This is work well done and meritorious, but it is not a reorientation of undertaking to the position of a corporal work of mercy. It is merely the application of Christian trimmings to a secularized institution.

The responsibility for restoring burial practices to their proper dignity lies chiefly with the undertakers. The policy of the customer always being right cannot apply to a work of mercy. If indeed undertaking were a profession as many of its members claim it to be, it would have to be a profession of Faith. The members of Christ are bound together by Charity, not dollar bills, consequently the measure



"DO YOU EVER THINK OF W





**S BEYOND ALL THIS ?"**

of their service one to the other should be prescribed by God Who is the source of Charity, and not by the man who holds the purse strings. It is sad when a man looks upon a brother in Christ and sees only customer.

As long as the burial of the dead falls under the authority of the undertaker, he must consider it his apostolic duty to bring it into conformity with the spirit of the Faith. His work is essentially as honorable and holy one. If it has degenerated to a kind of macabre stage performance, only he can restore it. Responsibility and authority go hand in hand.

Because it is truly a *good work*, and because Catholic undertakers are far from unaware of the dignity of their work, a few reforms, a few new customs, would go far toward remedying the situation. For example, if the undertaker and his family assumed as their obligation a special apostolate toward the dead, daily saying special prayers for the souls of those whose bodies they have cared for, a peace and dignity would soon characterize their lives and work. Were the funeral director to make a habit of his and his assistants devoutly participating in the Requiem Mass a new integration between the Faith and the vocation would be achieved.

Flowing from this would come greater insight into the social significance of decent dying. Perhaps pious associations of Catholic undertakers could be formed designed to sanctify their calling. Such associations might effectively influence the memorial industry reminding the merchants that dollars and cents are no more than accidental considerations in a work of mercy.

When the undertaker assumes the initiative, his success will rest in the amount of cooperation he gets from his fellow parishioners and from all those who help him in his work. Assistants, hack-drivers, grave-diggers, must realize the source of their dignity. Local gossip might do well to mediate upon death before they criticize any deviation from the absurd conventions of the times.

Perhaps organized Catholic Action can throw its weight in the direction of decent dying just as it is now active in restoring matrimony to its proper position. Insurance salesmen should not perpetuate the myth that it is a disgrace not to provide for one's own burial. Christian tradition sets this up as an honor and privilege for the friends of the deceased to care for his remains, which need not, incidentally, require the huge sums which insurance companies have made possible.

There is a hallowed tradition among Christians that last things shall be first. The apostolic undertaker might be the man to dignify



the way we die, as a constant reminder of the undignified way in which we live. With such examples being shown, perhaps the customer would, for a change, be right, at least about last things.

FLOYD ANDERSON *and* ED WILLOCK.

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### HOT TIP

If you should ever chance to go,  
To those dark regions down below,  
You'd find the place with people cluttered,  
Who knew which side their bread was buttered.

# Death in a Modern Hospital

Having worked for over nine years in a modern American hospital, I have seen death in all its sadness, knowing that it could and should be much more consoling than it is, even to those not of the Faith.

It matters little whether the dying are in a luxurious private room, a semi-private room, or a ward—death when it strikes finds them almost always alone. I remember a world-famous pianist dying with no one near him. The newspapers told of his family's being present, but they did not arrive until long after his demise, and he had feared death. Most of those do who think this life is the most important. When a patient is dying the nurse on duty calls the doctor, gives what emergency treatment she can, and then goes on with her other duties, looking in on the patient from time to time to see if life still lingers on.

Patients with chronic and incurable diseases often ask about the true state of their health, but no doctor tells them the truth. In all the years I have spent in hospital work I can only remember one case of a patient being told outright that she was dying. Her subsequent hysteria and attempt at suicide were a good example for the other interns not to repeat the mistake. It is true, as the doctors claim, that not very many are able to take it.

The average person today, even though he has a faith of sorts, has been absorbed all his life with the things of this world without any thought for the hereafter. Consequently, when he feels material life slipping from his grasp and realizes that money is not able to buy what he most wants—health—he inevitably loses his balance. Most doctors are no more spiritually minded than the patients and, since they are unable to furnish patients with hope in everlasting life, they hesitate out of kindness, to plunge them into despair in the face of death. It is that many die without ever really knowing that they are doomed and thus without putting their houses in order.

When a student approaches the final examination for a degree he invariably crams and studies to prepare himself for it. His family wouldn't think much of him if he were to forget all about it and go out to have fun just before rushing in to face the examiners, yet that is exactly what families force upon those they love when they permit them to rush unprepared and without forewarning toward the great examination that no one can escape.

Probably most dying people remember long forgotten bits about God, and fragments of prayers, but unfortunately no one is nearby whom they can mention such things, and so their loneliness is even greater than it would be if people were able to talk to them of God.



and religion. Catholics receive the last Sacraments, often belatedly, but abbis and ministers seldom visit their sick flocks. Evidently their presence is considered unnecessary until the funeral. So it is that many a human slips into the final coma without help, ignorant of the unknown he must face. In the light of eternity it might be better to die by electrocution in Sing Sing than of natural causes in the best hospital. No one pretends that the condemned man has led an unblemished life, no one kids him about his expectations in regard to longevity, and the consolations of religion are at hand by law.

Modern man, like his ancestors in the Middle Ages, is still composed of body and soul, but unlike those ancients he pays little heed to the soul. The cult of the body, its comfort, well-being and adornment take up most of his waking hours. Death and decay are never thought of, and when death approaches, it is ignored until too late. How little the soul of man is considered, when such specialized attention is given to each part of the body! Doctors, many of whom have little or no faith, customarily see only the exterior, only the diseased body. They do not allow the patient to face reality. In their great humanitarian efforts they do not permit the patient to suffer and, if there is no hope for recovery, they would like to permit mercy killing as the ease-all of pain.

On the list of the Euthanasia Society in New York City are thousands of names of reputable physicians and surgeons, and new names are constantly being added. A list of these names can be obtained, and it is surprising how many well-known men subscribe to this modern Murder Incorporated. What escapes the minds of these men is this: the knowledge of whence they themselves have come, why they are here and, most important of all, whither they are going. They cannot see that euthanasia is the most horrible of all practices society has invented to date, and might well kill the very ones who thought of it as a cure for the sufferings of their fellow men. What is an incurable disease? Many years ago tuberculosis killed almost all who contracted it, yet today very few ever die of it. The same is true of many other illnesses which no longer take their toll of human lives. Killing the patients takes away the means of studying diseases, thus retarding science, and, if ever permitted legally, will be the death of the nation.

Euthanasia is sometimes practised in hospitals. A doctor will make use of his knowledge in order to destroy life, and sometimes a family will even ask this of the doctor.

Strange as it may seem, many Catholic nurses, while not outrightly in favor of euthanasia, see its usefulness in cases of agonizing suffering. Living as they do in a pagan atmosphere, their thinking becomes tar-

nished. Above all, they do not realize the reason for suffering and the uses to which it can be turned.

Families at the bedside of the dying are often very awkward. They do not know how to act in the face of death (they rarely pray) or they become so hysterical that they are a great trial to those present. It is their ignorance of all matters pertaining to death that is to blame. In this class some Catholics can be included, especially those who will not permit their loved ones to receive the last rites for fear of alarming them, forgetting in their false solicitude that Extreme Unction is also a healing Sacrament, and has been known to restore health in grave illnesses.

God is the important goal toward which men should travel. All men, of all creeds and colors and nationalities. Catholic doctors and nurses have a serious moral obligation to help even our separated brethren, and those of no particular religion, to reach that goal. In our pagan age it is almost impossible for those out of the fold not to commit mortal sin. To let them die without giving them a chance to acknowledge their guilt and to say they are sorry is a grave offence.

In our crowded and under-staffed modern hospitals time is rather scarce and many tasks clamor to be done every minute. This is, perhaps, one reason why Catholic nurses do not get around to giving the dying some of the help they need for the last journey. It is sad that no one ever prays at the deathbed of a non-Catholic. For that matter, many a Catholic has died in my hospital without a prayer being said. Only once in the nine years I have been in this place can I remember having seen a Catholic nurse kneel and pray at a deathbed.

The need for integral Catholic doctors, interns, and nurses is great. We need them to teach those around us the true values of life, but especially the reason for man's being and his goal. We need constant reminding that the best way to get to the goal is not by the extermination of suffering, but by the extermination of sin. It is not by killing the patient that he is helped, but rather by teaching him to use pain as reparation for his own guilt and that of others, who through this aid may receive the grace to turn to God.

In our prayers we all ought to include those dying alone and left in our over-efficient centers of healing, asking that God may grant them the grace of true contrition.

LEONA M. SEGEBRECHT



# The Christian Life

Our Lord came to cast fire upon the earth, which was the love of God, and it was His intention and desire that this fire should catch and spread like a forest fire. In our day, despite the dreadful extent of the ravages of evil, the fire that Christ cast has caught in countless souls. These souls, many thousands right here in America, burn with the love of God; they thirst to grow in His love, to be united to Him in complete and perfect union, and to spread His kingdom everywhere. Only they do not know how to go about it, what to do themselves, that they may grow in holiness and love, and so too, how they can help others. This is a good and sufficient reason for trying, with God's help, to explain how souls can live the Christian life in its fulness, how they can grow in the knowledge and the love of God, and be united with Him as perfectly as is possible in this life.

There are ever so many ways of doing this. It would be difficult to find a better teacher than St. John of the Cross. He stands out, without anyone questioning it, as one of the great spiritual authorities in the history of the Church. His doctrine is in complete accord with St. Thomas Aquinas. It is hardly going too far to say that his doctrine of the spiritual life is the official doctrine of the Church. Pope Pius XI made him a Doctor of the Church because of his doctrine, and so gave it the stamp of official approval.

St. John of the Cross was a Carmelite and, working with St. Teresa of Avila in Spain in the second half of the sixteenth century, was instrumental in founding the Discalced Carmelites. Under the figure of climbing a mountain he teaches the doctrine of the progress of the Christian soul from the beginning to final perfection in complete union with God. He calls this mountain Carmel, because tradition taught that the Carmelites were originally founded by the prophet Elias on Mount Carmel in Palestine. The doctrine is contained in four great works, each of which marks a stage in the advance up the mountain to perfect union with God at the top. These works are, in order: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame of Love*.

Very few souls attain to the perfection of the last stage of complete union with God. Nevertheless, the doctrine is the same, and true for all who are blessed with the love of God, and are advancing in it, no matter how far they have progressed. We shall give the substance of his doctrine, sufficient for the guidance of all souls, so they will know what the way is, whether they are on the right track, and what to do, no matter where they stand.

The whole doctrine can be summed up quite simply, and in very few words. Perfection in the Christian life is to become like Christ. We can never become exactly like Christ. Our Lord was a man and He was the Son of God. In Him the human nature was united to the Divine Nature and the Divine Person. Other men cannot share a union with God exactly like that. In the case of other men human nature is united to human personality. So with them the human nature and the human person, for perfect union, are united to God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Keeping this carefully in mind we can say that for union with God here on earth (and it will be the same in heaven) every man must be as nearly as possible like Christ was a man. Every thought, word and deed of man must be what Christ would think, say or do.

This brings us to the first great principle which covers everything. Every man who wants to travel the road toward union with God must cast forth out of his mind and soul everything that is not God. This is the way it was with Our Lord, and that is the way it must be with other men. A reader should stop here, and lay this aside for awhile, and allow the tremendous import of that statement to sink in. No one can come to complete union with God until he has rooted up and expelled from his soul everything that is not God!

This is so primary and fundamental that it is best to give the words of St. John himself:

These counsels for conquering the desires, which now follow, although few and brief, I believe to be as profitable and efficacious as they are concise; so that one who sincerely desires to practise them will need no others, but will find them all included in these.

First, let him have an habitual desire to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life.

Secondly, in order to do this well, every pleasure that presents itself to the senses, if it be not purely for the honor and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the honor and glory of God. . . .

Strive always to choose, not that which is easiest, but that which is most difficult;

not that which gives most pleasure, but rather that which gives least;

not that which is restful, but that which is wearisome;

not that which gives consolation, but rather that which makes disconsolate;

not that which is greatest, but that which is least;

not that which is loftiest and most precious, but that which is lowest and most despised;

not that which is a desire for anything, but that which is a desire for nothing;

Strive not to go about seeking the best of temporal things, but the worst.

All this is for beginners, and at the very beginning. These counsels are to enable the soul to know how to start.

It is not a pleasant prospect; nor should it be. The soul that wants to be like Christ must expect dreadful sufferings; he must be prepared to face those last dark moments on the cross. Nor is it only that he may meet them. They are as certain as death. One who follows Christ must meet them; his life must be a continual crucifixion. It is not a life of ease and complacency.

St. John of the Cross wrote primarily for certain chosen souls of his own holy order of Carmel. But he tells us himself that it is for anyone who wants to take it. Anyone in the Church, everyone could take that doctrine, accept it, and follow it, and God would be pleased.

Before close union with God can take place the soul must be purified from all defilement and imperfection. He does not speak of turning from mortal sin. Those he addresses have turned away from grievous sin, and want to come close to God. The whole question now is that of purifying the soul. Complete union cannot take place as long as there is the least imperfection in the soul. Our Lord had a human soul like ours, and our soul must become pure like His.

The first two of the four works are devoted to describing how this purification of the soul is wrought to prepare it for perfect union with God. God does part of it, the soul does part. Of course, even in the part the soul does, God works with it, because all good that man does comes from God, and God does it. But in this part there is a very definite work that the soul has to do for itself, and this then is wholly man's, but because it is good it is wholly God's too. This is a great mystery into which we cannot go any further now. Suffice it to say that man has a part to play in the purification of his own soul. This part of his consists in removing all obstacles, so that God can work in the soul. Man must cut out ruthlessly everything that is not God.

The soul must deprive itself of its desire for all the pleasures it derives from sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. When the soul rejects and denies that which it can derive through the senses, we can quite well say that it is dark and empty. What is there left? So St. John speaks of this state as night; this is the night of the senses, or of the sensual part of the soul. Remember, purification consists in voiding and stripping the soul of every desire.



Without this mortification the soul no more achieves progress on the road to perfection and to the knowledge of God and of itself, however many efforts it may make, than the seed grows when it is cast upon untilled ground. . . . Any desire, although it be but for the smallest imperfection, stains and defiles the soul. . . . Voluntary desires must be driven away, every one howsoever small it may be. . . . And the reason is that the state of this Divine union is the soul's total transformation in the will of God.

The soul wills only what God wills. "For if this soul desired an imperfection that God wills not, there would not be made one will . . . God, since the soul would have a will which God had not." In all these matters, for a good understanding of them, we ought to go back constantly to the human soul of Our Lord, and so judge what the soul of the just man ought to be like.

All desires of the good things of life, food, money, honors, family, health, all must be eradicated. Nor in his lengthy exposition does the Saint soften these harsh prescriptions. It is only God Who counts all. We can say, by way of anticipation, that God arranges things for the best, and anyone who leaves father, mother, family for His sake receives a hundredfold even in this life. St. John himself "loved the countryside . . . he had an exquisite sensibility, he was one of the greatest poets of Spain; he had a profound tenderness for his brother Francis, the poor mason, and a deep delight in his spiritual children." But the soul must not think of things like that. She must take the plunge. Again, what is left? As far as things that can be perceived by the senses are concerned there is nothing. As far as the senses are concerned, the soul is empty and it is night for it.

Next there is the higher part of the soul, where reason presides and acts. Jesus had no thoughts, imaginations, memories other than those of the Divine Person in Him. So must it be with every man in union with God. The man who strives for full union with God must have no thoughts, no imaginations, no memories, no desires whatever but those which God operates in him. He must discipline himself so that he does not think of anything, remember anything. This is to be taken very literally and exactly. All particular knowledge must go.

His soul becomes empty. Only one thing remains, one thought, one activity. He knows that God is there; he knows this is what God wants; he trusts Him and hopes in Him; he loves Him without knowing how, or why, or even that he does love Him. He cannot see God, he knows that He is there. But it is all darkness.

\* \* \*

Beginners will make use of meditation. This exercise is possible.

and easy, even for busy lay people. It means practising oneself in thinking about God and Divine things. The time comes when the soul must leave off meditation. So far we are speaking of what the soul does through and by its own efforts, always aided, as said above, by God's grace. We must bear in mind that all the time God is in the soul, secretly working Himself. The time will come when He will take over and do everything Himself. To prepare itself and make ready for that, at the proper time, the soul must quit meditation. St. John gives very explicit instructions how to know when that time comes. This is one of the most critical moments in the whole journey of the soul to union with God. It is so shocking to the soul to be told that it must not even think about God, it must not think about anything. The reason for this is because it is now time for God to begin to take over and operate in the soul. If the soul is thinking about anything, even about God and Divine things, these thoughts fill the soul, and it is not empty, ready to be filled with God, so that God can operate through the man's reason and thought in a manner resembling the way He reasoned and thought in Christ's soul.

So the soul must abandon meditation. St. John is most clear and explicit about this. He comes back to it again and again, he hammers it in. It is an utter impossibility to make any further progress, unless the soul gives up meditation. There will be all sorts of differences among souls. Some will arrive at this point sooner than others. The majority of those who start out do reach this stage, and usually in a short time. The reason why a great many of them advance no further is because they keep on at meditation when they should drop it, and remain quiet, attentive to the touches of God, and the breathing of the Holy Spirit. Some souls, after they have left meditation, will have to return to it at times until they are firmly entrenched in the next stage.

\* \* \*

This is, in outline, what the soul has to do by its own efforts on the way to union with God. The prospect is not one of pleasant enjoyment. Only experience can tell us what will happen to a soul which follows faithfully the directions here laid down, experience and a divinely inspired understanding of what God tells us in the Holy Scriptures. St. John of the Cross had both, and he tells us what the life of that soul is like. It is a life of anguish and bitter suffering; at times death would be a joy. It is true that at times sweet joy pervades the soul, and gentle touches of God, spiritual consolations and comforts, but only at times; but even these, the soul must not desire them, must even turn from them and take no pleasure in them. She must strip

herself to the skin, yea, she should strip off her very skin. No, it is not a pleasure journey.

\* \* \*

And this is not all. In fact, it is only the beginning, and the earliest part of the way. The work of the soul's own efforts is finished. When it has annihilated all the desires of the life of the senses, emptied itself of all these, and purified its rational life, of understanding, memory and will, its work is done. We have here the explanation of the whole doctrine of mortification in the discipline of the Church.

\* \* \*

Now God Himself takes charge. The Word, the Son, the Second Person begins to operate in a new way in the soul. He had been there all the time, and working too, along with the Father and the Holy Ghost, but hidden and secret. He is hidden now too, but this time. He is not seen because the light of His presence is so intense it blinds the soul, and the soul is in utter darkness, can see nothing because of the excess of light. This state of the soul is what is called contemplation, infused contemplation, because God, as it were, pours His presence into the soul. He does not yet bestow upon the soul that love for which it so longs. Far from it; that union cannot come until every slightest imperfection is burned out of the soul. And she is still very imperfect, poor, weak, defiled, wretched. She walks in twofold darkness of night. She can see nothing of God because of the great light of His presence; that is one darkness. She sees her own wretched condition and unworthiness, and how unfit she is that He should have anything to do with her; she is sure she deserves nothing but to be cast out of His presence into the bottom of hell. This is her greatest suffering. Human words fail utterly to express what the soul endures in this condition. The sufferings up to now, though indescribable, are as nothing to what she enters upon now. She is filled with black darkness, and this is the other kind of darkness.

The soul did all she could do by her own efforts to purge away the grave defilements of her nature. She is still far removed from that purity required for God to unite Himself to her after the manner in which He was united to the human body and soul in Our Lord. And the soul must resemble the soul of Christ. She herself can do no more. It is God Who does the rest. In the first stage of purification God purifies the soul of every imperfection. She does nothing whatever; there is nothing she can do except not interfere with God's work in her.

She went to work at the lower part of her nature, the sensual part, and cleaned and scoured it, cut and burned, to make it pure and clean; then she did the same for her understanding, her memory and



her will. It was all so bitter and terrible, it seemed beyond human endurance. Now God starts to work. It is as if what she did was nothing at all. God now purifies her sense nature and her higher nature of reason. She is like impure gold and He puts her in a furnace and burns her until all the impurities are burned out. No tongue can tell, or even begin to describe, what sufferings this entails. And all the while she so realizes her less-than-nothingness that she is sure God must hate her. This is the worst suffering of all. As if it were not enough, the Devil never ceases to torment and use all his wiles and artifices to mislead her. This state of the soul, the first stage of contemplation, is called the Dark Night of the Soul.

That blackness and suffering, the pain and anguish are not continuous. The Divine Word loves the soul. He would not be doing this if He did not. Sometimes He imparts to her touches of unutterable sweetness, and she experiences bliss beyond words; she knows not whence it comes or how. But these moments are like flashes of lightning in the darkness of the night.

When He is finished with the purification of her soul she will be fit to go straight to God. It is really the sufferings of purgatory which she is going through. Souls which suffer this purification to the end, if they die then, go straight to heaven without passing through purgatory at all. Very few souls experience it to the end.

\* \* \*

St. John of the Cross composed a poem describing the progress of a soul from the first beginning until the final consummation in full and perfect union with God. Competent authorities rank it as one of the greatest love poems in all literature. The four works we are studying were written to explain the poem. It is a love poem. This must never be lost to mind. It is the love story of two who fall hopelessly in love with each other, become betrothed, and finally become one in the consummation of marriage. It is hard to go to extremes in the stark realism of the lover and his beloved, the bride and her spouse, and their union in marriage. The bride is the soul which has passed through the two dreadful nights of purgation, and is now all ready for her lover and her bridegroom. We can learn something of that Divine betrothal and marriage of God the Son with the purified soul, not because this latter resembles the former, but because earthly marriage, the pure love and union of man and woman, is an image of that heavenly marriage of God with the soul. And it is only in this way that the true nature of human marriage can be understood. People marvel at how the mystics speak of love better than anyone else, when they have had no experiences of human love themselves. It is because they are in love with God.

Picture to yourself the most perfect communion and union of the most perfect lovers possible, the joy and happiness with each other; you are infinitely below the peace, the pleasure, the joy, the happiness of this union of the soul with God. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man to conceive it. All those blessed despair of talking about it.

At the beginning of the betrothal of the soul to the Word, the Son of God, God reveals to the soul great things of Himself, makes beautiful in majesty and grandeur. The soul has a vision and a foretaste of abundant and inestimable riches, and finds there all the repose and refreshment desired; it attains to the secrets of God, which is the food of those who know Him most; it is conscious of the awful power of God, tastes of the wonderful sweetness of the Spirit, finds its true rest and divine light, drinks deeply of the wisdom of God, which shines forth in the harmony of the creatures, and the works of God. The most subtle and delicate knowledge enters with marvelous sweetness and delight into the innermost substance of the soul, which is the highest of all delights. Still we are not to think that what the soul perceives, though pure truth, can be the perfect and clear fruition of heaven. In the betrothal the peace is not yet perfect. And the Devil can still attack it.

Spiritual marriage, beyond all comparison, is a far higher state than that of betrothal. It is a complete transformation in the Beloved, whereby they surrender each to the other, the entire possession of themselves in perfect union of love. In this union of love, so far as is possible in this life, the soul becomes God, by participation. St. John believes that no soul ever attains to the state without being confirmed in grace. The nature of God and the nature of the soul are so united, that without undergoing any essential change, each seems to be God. The Bridegroom reveals His secrets to the bride. The chief of these are the sweet mysteries of the Incarnation, the ways and means of redemption, which is one of the greatest works of God. He infuses love and increases it, without infusing and increasing distinct knowledge. The soul now, in a certain sense, is like Adam in paradise who knew no evil. It is so innocent that it sees no evil. Such a soul will scarcely intermeddle in the affairs of others, because it forgets even its own. Love has set the soul on fire, and transmuted it into love. God is pleased only with love. All our works, all our labors, however grand soever they may be, are nothing in the sight of God, for we can give Him nothing. It is the property of love to place him who loves on an equality with the object of his love. Hence the soul is equal to God in love, she loves Him with the same love with which He loves her. She would not be satisfied with anything less.

The understanding of such a soul is the understanding of God, its will is the will of God, its memory the eternal memory of God, and its delights the delights of God. And the substance of such a soul, while all the time being other than the substance of God, for it cannot be substantially changed into Him, nevertheless is united with Him, absorbed into Him, is God by participation. He will do for His beloved anything she asks. Until this state is reached it is necessary to make acts of love. Now it is not necessary that the soul should occupy itself in other and exterior duties (unless they be matters of obligation) which might hinder, were it but for a moment, the life of love in God. This is true even though they may minister greatly to His service; an instant of pure love is more precious in the eyes of God and the soul, and more profitable to the Church, than all other good works together, though it may seem as if nothing were done.

\* \* \*

"O that men would understand how impossible it is to enter the thicket, the manifold riches of God, without entering into the thicket of manifold suffering, making it the desire and consolation of the soul; and how that the soul which really longs for divine wisdom longs first of all for the sufferings of the Cross."

This is the spiritual doctrine of St. John of the Cross. There it is, complete, standing above the vicissitudes of time in its universality, as true and valid today as it was in the sixteenth century, and it will always be the same. It may cause surprise that there is no mention in it of things one would expect, saying prayers, attendance at Mass, or saying Mass, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, novenas, Stations of the Cross, indulgences, not even Confession and Holy Communion. What of them? In answer to this question this much can be said: St. John of the Cross said Mass like an angel; his life was a life of prayer; like one other he passed whole nights in prayer; the great work of his life was hearing confessions and guiding souls in holiness; the Blessed Virgin was his very mother, on two occasions she saved his life by a striking miracle, his devotion to her was intense and life-long; his whole order was dedicated to her. His spiritual doctrine stands by itself, it can be used with supreme confidence by those who know nothing of his life; but any interpretation of it which conflicts with his life would obviously have to be an incorrect one. Prayer and the Sacraments have their place in his teaching.

When this is said, it must be insisted on that the central principle in his doctrine is this, for a man to lead the Christian life perfectly (normally speaking, God can work miracles in special cases) there are certain things that he must do by his own efforts, and there is no way out of it. He must ruthlessly annihilate in himself everything



that is not God, all desires, and everything else. He must do this himself. There are things that God does, and others He leaves to man. Man has to do these. For example, suppose one has worldly ambition to shine among men. He must give that up by efforts of his own will. He can pray for strength to be able to make the efforts. He cannot expect God to take that desire away from him. It would be like a farmer being so pious that he would kneel beside his bed and ask God to put in his crop and harvest it for him. God could do that, but He does not do things like that.

\* \* \*

How far is this teaching of St. John of the Cross applicable today in America? He would say it is in every respect applicable to everyone, and everywhere. It is not an expedient technique; it is solid doctrine, founded on Divine Truth. It is true, only a rare few have reached the final stage. It does not follow that those who do not attain that union are not friends of God. St. John thinks a great man could go much further than they do if they knew better what they should do. Insofar as they do advance in the love of God this is the way they must go, whether they know it or not. This is capital. There is no progress in spirituality except by way of mortifying and purifying the soul. This doctrine is valid in its entirety for all ages, and all classes, and conditions, rich or poor, strong or weak, married or single, old or young.

Naturally, some states of life are more suited to the cultivation of the spiritual life than others. This is the seed, cause and explanation of religious life in the Church, and why St. Thomas holds it the perfect state of life. It was for this very purpose it was planned. It is not that all religious are holy, or that others are not holy. It means that religious life most lends itself to the attainment of perfection. The intense physical pleasures, and the cares and worries of married life, make it harder to give oneself wholly to God. Only mortal sin turns man away from God. Otherwise he is a friend of God. If he wants to go up higher, normally he must want to do so of his own free will and with that same freedom make those efforts here laid down. Let him cling fast to that principle, and follow it, and he will not wander around but always head straight to the goal of perfect union with God. If not as perfect as possible in this life, then, at least finally, in the eternal kingdom of God.

HENRY CARR, C.S.B.

# The Unwise

## A STORY

In the vestibule of his establishment, Tobias Bunnell teetered slowly on his heels and stared moodily through the glass door at the weather outside. "Bunnell's Funeral Parlor" bathed the lawn in pink neon; by its light he could see the hard drizzle drilling on the walk. Thoughtfully, he diddled his upper lip with his tongue, jingled the coins in his pockets and reflected that it was no hell of a night for a wake.

For thirty years the only furniture dealer and undertaker in five northwestern Connecticut villages, Tobias often took a personal interest in his clients; he had, in his time, buried whole families. In the present case, he felt no such interest. As Judge of Probate in Judea, the deceased, Charlie Benson, had ruled against Tobias years ago in a property suit. Tobias had put down Charlie as a cozy article; he was scarcely saddened now by Charlie's fatal heart attack in his feedstore two days before.

Tobias looked at his watch and again at the rain. Eight-thirty, and only seven people in the parlor. Judea was a dozen miles away; half of the relatives would stay home, the other half show up late. They'd hang around waiting for something to happen—the thing would drag along till eleven.

He was surprised in his thoughts by a young man bounding up the porch steps, stomping his feet, vigorously slinging the rain off his hat and presenting himself gravely at the door. Tobias straightened, gently opened the door and, in as funereal a tone as possible for a fat little man in a wrinkled brown suit, asked:

"Relative of the deceased?"

The young man smiled faintly. "A nephew."

"Ah!" breathed Tobias, taking his things. The trench coat and pin-stripe suit looked out-of-town. "So sad about your uncle," he was saying. "Came so sudden. . ."

The young man was surprised. "You knew my uncle?"

"Charlie? Known him for years. Fine man." Mentally Tobias seated him with Mrs. Thurber, the sister from Litchfield, and the niece from Cornwall Bridge. "Care to sign the book?" he asked casually, indicating with a wave of his pen to a register on a bible stand. He waited while the young man advanced to the book and wrote scratchily: "Roger Sprague, New Haven, Conn." Then he said, "This way, please," and led the young man through what had once been a living room, where the other guests sat in fidgety little groups, to the alcove where the casket was.

The young man followed reluctantly; he had never seen death. His eyes blinked in the unreal amber glow of the torch-bulbs; the visitors watched him indifferently. As he approached the alcove, the odor of embalming touched his stomach.

Tobias stood at the head of the coffin. "There he is," he said. The young man hesitated, stepped forward to kneel, checked himself. There was no kneeling bench. He looked around; no cross, no candles. A budget funeral? Then he remembered. The Congregational ways of his father came back to him. He felt rebuked; a Yankee turned Roman.

"Natural, ain't he?" remarked Tobias in a stage whisper.

"What?"

"Looks natural, don't he?" repeated Tobias conversationally.

"Oh yes, yes. . ."

Roger Sprague had not seen his uncle for years; he stared at the shrunk skull, the knotted hands unnaturally folded on the still chest, the sparse, graying hair inappropriately cushioned in satin.

He thought: this is my Uncle Charlie, my mother's brother. How strange he is. He is quite dead. How different, when we tromped down the haystack in his barn. It was hot in the mow. We kids got tired and he called up to us: "git movin'." His voice was hard and strong. In his feedstore, the grain room was dark—we scooped out handfuls from the bins and ate it, while he tallied over a legal point out front with a neighbor. His voice was deliberate, then, as he leaned against the counter, exploring little sideroads of the law. Till he stumbled and made a noise and he caught us and told us to scat. Then his voice was loud, he took big steps. How dead he is now.

Tobias shifted his teeth. "Your aunt, Mrs. Thurber, is here," he observed. "Mebbe you'd like to say hello."

The young man did not answer: "and at the hour of our death." Our duty. This, then, he thought bitterly: hands, lids folded, wrenched out of the continuity of our lives—pray for us now, when we are delivered up to the undertaker with the loose upper plate.

The mood of prayer evaporated. He reflected that Uncle Charlie, could he hear, would wince at the popish sentiment. He turned to the undertaker.

"I don't think she'd recognize me," he said. "It's been years. . ."

"Time to get acquainted," suggested Tobias, and led the young man into the parlor.

Mrs. Thurber filled the center of the couch. Large, washed and muscled, she sat back in wide-legged complacency, incongruously knitting and airing views to two high school girls flanking her on either side.

"In Science, of course," she was saying, "we don't hold with the gloomy view of death. Mrs. Eddy says . . ."

"Mrs. Thurber," interrupted Tobias, "here's your nephew, Roger Sprague."

The three looked up at him.

"Hello, Aunt Ruth," said Roger gravely. Tobias sidled away.

"Roger!" She recognized him, beamed brightly. "It's nice to see you. I never dreamed—isn't it awful? Seems like the only time the family—down, Roger. You remember your cousin Natalie, don't you?"

"Hello, Roger," muttered the thin girl on the right, indifferently. Her heavy lipstick accentuated her round, child's face; memory stirred in him a fist fight over a bicycle, years ago. Was she eighteen yet? Obviously, she was being "mature."

"Hello, Natalie, how are you?"

He pulled over a camp chair and sat before them. Somewhere in the bowels of the house, a doorbell buzzed softly.

"And this," said Mrs. Thurber, nodding graciously, "is Natalie's friend Mary Curran. Mary, Roger Sprague."

"How do you do?" murmured Mary Curran, in a precise, chaste voice. Her eyes met his an instant; they were steady, quite blue. They fluttered and withdrew from his stare.

He was alerted; the name . . . where . . .? He shuffled through his thoughts, could place her nowhere. He gave up, confused by her presence.

"How do you do?" he repeated mechanically.

She looked again, smiled hesitantly. She was slight, feminine; her heart-shaped face, framed in soft, light hair, breathed an astringent, clean scent. Her mouth was coral, moist, parted slightly. She sat forward in her precise way.



thin, long fingers clasped loosely on the dirndl skirt pulled modestly over her knees.

He sensed a warmth carefully withheld. He felt himself fill slowly with vague desire. He thought: *thou art fair . . . thou hast dove's eyes. . . .* Reluctantly he noticed a scar on her forehead, snaking crazily along the hairline. There. . . ?

"Poor Uncle Charlie," he said abruptly. "It was a shock. . ." He shook his head sadly. A group of middle-aged men passed through the alcove; they whispered among themselves. The others in the room stirred briefly like leaves ruffled by a breeze. One or two nodded to the newcomers:

"Lo, Bill."

"Hi, Fred."

"Poor Uncle Charles," repeated Natalie.

"You were very fond of your uncle?" Mary Curran asked the young man.

"Yes," he answered. "Though, frankly," he corrected himself, "I . . ."

"Roger hasn't seen his uncle since he was twelve," explained Mrs. Thurber, arching for a dropped stitch. "His people moved to New Haven."

"Are you from Judea?" asked Roger.

"No, Cornwall," said Mary Curran. Then added, as though answering the real question, "I came to keep Natalie company. She was a little . . . afraid, I think." She smiled at Natalie to show she was explaining, not criticizing. Natalie smirked lamely.

"I suppose I feel *respect* for Uncle Charlie," resumed Roger. "To me, he is always sort of a monument, a pillar of respectability and . . . well, decency."

Mrs. Thurber giggled. "Roger, that's about the nicest thing you could've said. Coming from a nephew, I call that a real compliment."

Nobody could think of anything to add to that. The conversation withered. They smiled blandly at each other, looked out at the late arrivals. Mrs. Thurber waved hello to a friend across the room, fished up slack on her yarn and began new row. Natalie appraised a young man standing in a group. Disturbed by Roger's interest, Mary Curran examined her hands.

"I'm afraid," Roger ventured, "I broke up your conversation by coming here."

"Oh, it was nothing," answered his aunt. "We were just discussing death."

"Oh," he responded gravely. "It gives you something to think about, doesn't it?" No one agreed. "I mean," he went on, "here we are, talking so lamely . . . and in the next room . . ."

"Yes?" challenged his aunt.

"Oh, nothing. It's just that . . . it doesn't seem appropriate, somehow. I mean, some prayers . . . or some sort of service . . ."

"Fiddlesticks!" interrupted Mrs. Thurber, knitting rapidly. "Everyone's here to pay his respects. Charles lived a good life—an honest official and townsman. Now he's gone to his reward. We ought to rejoice for him. Why, if he could come back now, he'd want people . . . that's why I can't get used . . . expect him to get right up outa that coffin any minute and scold us all for bringin' gloomy, and then go lookin' for his pipe." She bent over and inspected her work.

"I didn't mean it that way, Aunt Ruth," said the young man contritely. He felt absurd. "You're not Yankee, are you?" he asked the girl suddenly.

"No," she answered, surprised. "Why?"

"You'll be pleased to hear, Mary," said Mrs. Thurber with emphasis, pat-

ting her work in her lap, "that you have a fellow-Catholic in Roger. Ca home from college a convert."

"Really?" said Mary Curran. "That *is* interesting." She looked at warmly, questioningly.

"Oh yes," continued Mrs. Thurber, "it was the gossip of the family."

"It's hard to keep secret," said Mary Curran, smiling at the young m Feeling talked about, he retired from her gaze.

"Why did you ask . . . about being Yankee?" she encouraged him.

"I should think you'd find a Yankee wake rather . . . different," he remark

"Not especially," she answered coolly. It evidently displeased her to sides.

"You don't feel that something is—lacking?" He was blundering; knew it. "I mean," he stumbled, "a wake should be something more than sort of get-together, don't you think? Because death is important, so al lute, something final. . ."

Pain crossed her face. She tried to smile, failed, looked away. "I a with Mrs. Thurber," she said, studying the rug. "We should rejoice with y uncle. Death is final—but it is not a tragedy."

Had he hurt her, said something wrong? He did not know, could fathom the tension he felt. He had only been making conversation, he wanted to say that death had supernatural implications—he had thought would agree.

"You know, Mary," said Mrs. Thurber, yanking up yarn, "you sound like Mary Baker Eddy. Have you ever read *Science and Health*?"

"I don't think so," answered the girl.

"You ought to, I'm sure you'd like it. I was reading just this morning.

"Evenin', Ruth," said the first of the three men. "Rotten weather, : it?" They stood uncertainly beside the sofa. They wore the left-over solemn expressions—they had just come from the alcove.

"Why, Bill Ormsbee, hello!" Mrs. Thurber stood up quickly. Na jumped up to join her. An outsider, Mary Curran remained seated. R looked at her as though to say: Now we can really talk. Her glance didl answer him. They sat in silence a moment.

"I'm afraid I was unkind," he said uncertainly.

"I'm afraid so," she agreed. She had lost her repose; her thin hands to absently with a handkerchief.

Desire flooded him again. He wanted to sit beside her, ask her for, ness. . . .

"I'm sorry," he said soberly.

"Don't see Candace anywheres," Bill Ormsbee was saying, looking aro

"Bill, you wouldn't know her," condoned Mrs. Thurber rapidly. "S in a state. She depended so on Charles . . ."

"Natalie Benson, Jim Appleyard." The second man was introducing to the third.

"It's so hard," resumed the young man earnestly, "to know what to sometimes. These people, my relatives, I mean—they regard me as sort renegade, a traitor."

"That's a pity," answered Mary Curran. She seemed preoccupied, unwi to pursue the thought. She watched Natalie and Appleyard as though ho to join them.

"Yes, it is," he went on quickly. "You see, Catholicism has given m much. So much that I want to share with *them*."

"Yes? Like what?" she asked, looking at him oddly. She was listening him again.

"So many things," he replied. He leaned forward, eager to explain. "About sacramental view of life, I mean, and the Mass, and the magnificent liturgy death."

"Do you know it?" she asked gravely.

"Oh yes, I've read it several times. I think there's no poetry like it—especially the preface: *Unto Thy faithful, O Lord, life is changed, not taken away . . .*"

"Yes, yes—very beautiful," she interrupted, in a small, tight whisper. She frowned, looked away again as though in pain.

"That's their great loss, you see—the sense of sacrament," he hurried on anxiously. "They denied the Sacraments, of course—my people, I mean, Yankees—in the very beginning. But still they had a strong sense of sin and of the hereafter. When they became 'liberal,' they lost even that. So now their religion has no content, and at their own funerals, they can only discuss how 'natural' the corpse looks. You do know what I mean, don't you?"

Mary Curran was silent a moment. Then she answered: "Unfortunately, I am not confined to Yankees."

"Perhaps not," he faltered, feeling he had overshot the mark. "But I was going to bring out . . ."

A wheezing, croupy, interminable cough startled the whole parlor. Ormsbee was doubled up; he spluttered and turned red. Appleyard thumped him on the back while Mrs. Thurber looked sympathetic and the rest of the room watched in alarm.

"Are ya all right, Bill?" asked Appleyard.

Ormsbee subsided with a gasp, pulled out a handkerchief and blew his nose. "God," he joked, "ya never know. Sounds like I'll be next."

"Bill! What a thing to say," chided Mrs. Thurber.

"'Strue, ain't it? Here today, gone tomorra. Weren't we kiddin' Charlie last week about him runnin' against me fer first selectman?"

"Ya know," said the second man, "I just can't believe he's gone." The others returned to their conversations.

"That's it," continued the young man talkatively, groping for the thread of his argument, "the sacramentality of life. It was a revelation to me—an immense, sublime fact. It's the only thing that can sanctify our lives—our deaths whatever we are. And that's why we of the Faith have such a responsibility . . ." He trailed off idiotically—her distress was plain. "But this is not new to you, of course," he ended.

"Oh, you're right," she said wearily. "We of the Faith need to be reminded of these things, too. We grow up so slowly to the greatness of our faith."

"Excuse me Mary." Aunt Ruth stood beside them. "I hate to interrupt this nice chat, but there's a cousin here from York State who's never met Roger." She gave the young man a meaningful look. He stood up unwillingly. "He'll be back in a few minutes, Mary," she shot over her shoulder, and piloted the young man across the room.

"I simply had to interfere," whispered Mrs. Thurber hurriedly on the way out. "I could see you were upsetting the girl. Really, Roger—although it's your fault, I suppose I should have warned you—you've got to be more careful of what you say to the girl. That's the Mary Curran who saw her sister killed in that awful smash-up last year. Here he is, Arnold. Roger, this is your



second cousin, Arnold Ohmen from Rheinbeck. Arnold, can you imagine little Clarissa Benson having a son this size?"

Pleasantries were served all around. They stood in a group surrounding Ohmen, a gaunt farmer apparently the feature because he was seldom seen. He said little, confined himself to nodding his head and muttering, "ayeh," so as to hide the cud in his cheek. His Adam's apple, sliding on long neck, periodically betrayed him.

"Studyin' law, eh?" he whined through brown teeth. He surveyed the young man, gulped juice. "Nothin' like education. Ayeh . . . ayeh . . . by the way, nothin' in the world fer a fella. . . ."

Roger Sprague was not listening. He stood there, uncomprehendingly stunned by the knowledge his aunt had supplied.

Mary Curran—that was the name. Even the New Haven papers had carried the account: ". . . an eyewitness stated. The driver, Ralph Lucas, had started down Warren Hill about fifty miles an hour. Passing out four corners, Lucas, blinded by the fog, continued on the left side of the road and smashed head-on into the car coming up the hill. The deceased, Agnes Curran, was thrown from the vehicle and crushed against the railing. Her sister, Mary Curran, also in the vehicle, suffered shock, three broken ribs, and laceration of the head. She was rushed to Hungerford Hospital where her condition was reported critical. Deceased was to have married Lucas this Saturday. Lucas, who escaped with minor abrasions, is missing and is sought by police questioning. Interment of the deceased, Agnes Curran, will take place at noon o'clock Saturday morning at . . ."

That was the name, all right. Had they caught Lucas? Useless to speculate—probably not. A G.I. gone nuts—never showed up at school again, anyway. It had shocked the campus for a week.

Mary Curran . . . his conversation with her no longer puzzled him. His agitation; he realized now what it hid. He understood her pain when she said "Death is final, but it is not a tragedy." Did she believe it? So firm a faith seemed impossible. He marvelled at her strength, her patience.

"Candace, of course, is a Woodruff," his aunt was saying. Methodically she spun her web. Ohmen added "ayeh" and swallowed furtively at appropriate intervals. "The Woodruffs were always like that," she went on. "Got it from their grandfather, old Enoch. Come to think of it, *he* was a Benson on his mother's side. . . ."

How she must despise him, thought Roger Sprague. Everything he said had been hideously inept. He loathed his own blind, opinionated stupidity. He sank into a pool of shame, humiliated by his egotism. His faith was real, idiotic. What did he know of sanctification?

He looked across the room for Mary Curran. She sat as they had her, eyes cast down, her head bent a little, like a bruised bird. Tobias Bunton moved along the wall, loudly banging camp chairs shut—time to go home.

"Ayeh," nodded Ohmen, "we're all gonna miss old Charlie."

"Excuse me," said the young man, and left the group. He crossed the parlor, sat down beside Mary Curran.

"I owe you an apology," he said gently.

"Do you?" She looked up absently.

"I'm afraid I was very tactless, before. You see, I didn't remember that terrible accident . . ."

"Oh," she said, looking away again. She gave no sign, merely acknowledged that now he knew.

"Please forgive me," he begged.

She tried to collect herself, to turn her attention to the young man. Her  
and, blue eyes searched his face for something—expression? sentiment?—  
couldn't imagine—then turned inward again in spite of herself. She had  
ld of some reflection she was loathe to leave.

"It's all right," she murmured softly. She fingered her handkerchief,  
died its design a moment, added, "It wasn't an accident, you see."

"Wasn't . . .?"

"I don't think so. I've wondered . . . They'd been quarrelling, Ralph and  
." She stared straight ahead, reliving the scene. "Sis was angry—I think she  
s beginning to realize—poor Ralph. . . He drove faster and faster. I asked  
n to slow down. Just before the crash, Sis cried out, 'My God! Here it is!'  
nd Ralph yelled back, 'See what your God can do for you now.'" She paused,  
sed her eyes.

"What a blasphemous thing . . ."

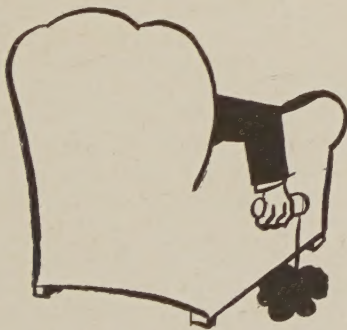
"Was it?" She turned, regarded him curiously. "Perhaps God did do for  
t," she whispered. She turned away again, musing. "Perhaps . . . foreseeing  
r marriage . . . God was kind and took her away . . ." Her breath caught on  
sob. She composed herself, asked, "Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do," answered Roger. "In the sight of the unwise," he quoted  
wly, "she seemed to die; but she is at peace."

He smiled tenderly at Mary Curran. Her grief and her acceptance seemed  
him a figure of the hundred hurts of all those whom, like her, he had never  
lly known: Aunt Ruth, Uncle Charlie, the people in this room, this town,  
e whole, unhappy world. A vast pity engulfed him.

He felt that now he somehow understood.

NEIL MACCARTHY



"God helps those who help themselves,"

Mr. Bleep was heard to say.

He helped himself to another drink,

And quietly passed away.



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BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 OF INTEGRITY  
published monthly at New York, N. Y. for Oct. 1, 1947.

State of New York }  
County of New York } ss

Before me, Bela A. Engel in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Edward Willock, who, having been duly sworn according to law deposes and that he is the Editor of the INTEGRITY and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily, weekly, semiweekly or triweekly newspaper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse side of this form, to wit:

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